For What Purpose Is a Believer Born Again?

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Introduction

> 2 Timothy 3:12
> "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

"Living godly" is the continuation of the new birth of a believer. A believer is a child of God and has received new life from Him. A believer has been saved on the ground of faith and on the ground of grace alone. Once he has become a child of God, that can never change again. It is impossible to undo this birth, just as it is impossible in the old creation to undo the birth of a natural person. It is possible to kill someone, but that does not undo the birth. Through the new birth man receives eternal life. This means that a believer has left death behind him. Eternal life cannot be undone. The new birth cannot be undone either. These things are settled. They rest on the work that God has accomplished through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have become partakers of that work on the ground of faith—not by works that we ourselves have done. We have done nothing to receive eternal life. Therefore we can do nothing by which we could lose that life.

That eternal life is untouchable and incorruptible. God undoubtedly had a reason for causing us to be born again. In the Old Testament new life is indeed promised, but that life is actually only promised for the Last Day. The Last Day is the day when the present old creation will disappear to make way for the new heavens and the new earth. For believers in Old Testament times this is a correct conclusion. They will be raised on the Last Day and will then become partakers of the new earth. In our days a person receives new, eternal life at the moment he comes to faith. At the moment someone comes to faith he has died and risen with Christ and has received new life. This happens in our days long before the disappearance of the whole old creation and the coming into being of new heavens and a new earth. The believer has received eternal life, but he still lives in an old, sinful body. What use is that eternal life to him if he is still living in a mortal and sinful body? During our dispensation people have come to faith. Since the Lord has not yet come, these believers have died. What use did they have of the eternal life they received at the new birth?

There are believers who do not see eternal life as a present reality. They push it into the future and say, "We shall see that in the future. It is enough to die saved." While waiting for that "saved dying" they then live

their own life—a life that in essence differs in nothing from the practical life of an unbeliever. In a large part of the New Testament epistles it is explained what the purpose is of receiving eternal life in a sinful body. These epistles devote a great deal of attention to the fact that since the resurrection of Christ the believer has already received eternal life while he still lives in a sinful body. In the New Testament epistles a description is usually first given of the position of the believer. Then it is explained for what purpose God has already given the believer new life before the Last Day.

> Romans 1:18-21
> "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

God is the Creator. He made the creation. The purpose is that the creation/the creature should serve Him. God created something/someone so that it/he should stand at His service. From this passage it is clear that the creature can know God—even apart from the Bible. The creation illustrates God's power and Godhead. Man can know God, and therefore it is held against him when he does not thank or glorify God. From this we must conclude that the creation is expected to give honour to the Creator—in the practice of life, of course. This is the starting point.

The Old Creation

In Romans 3 we find a description of the natural man, who forms part of the old creation brought into being by God.

> Romans 3:9-12
> "What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

Here it says that every man is under sin. This means that every man is controlled by sin. It is a power that stands above him. The natural man stands under the power of sin and is therefore ruled by sin. That is why no one is righteous. Romans 1 says that man ought to glorify and thank God. Romans 3 summarises briefly that man is in fact not able to do so because of sin. No man is righteous, understanding, or good. Man has become unprofitable. Therefore man is not able to serve God. In the best case that man lives to the honour of his fellow man. Usually, however, he lives to his own honour. The old creation has become unprofitable and cannot serve God. That is why God has made believers new creatures so that they can

glorify, thank and serve Him. The believer must be thoroughly convinced that he ought to live and walk to the honour of God. That is why the believer is told that he should not be a seeker of vain glory.
Galatians 5:26
“Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.”
Man by nature seeks his own (vain) glory. He does not acknowledge that God exists. In doing so he himself becomes the highest (“the crown”) of creation and lives to the glorification of himself. That glory is vain. The believer must not be a seeker of vain glory. He must give God the honour that is due to Him. He is able to do so, for God has made him fit to serve Him. For he has become a new creation! He has become a new creation precisely in order to be able to serve God. There are believers who think they can only serve God when they have been delivered from their old, sinful body. They therefore push the serving of God into the future. They see themselves merely as sinners who are not able to serve God. In the light of the New Testament epistles this is an incorrect line of thought. At the moment someone comes to faith he is born again. From that moment he is a believer and he must learn to serve God. He must learn that now, while he is still in his sinful body, so that he will also be able to serve God in the future.

Justified by Faith

> Romans 5:1-2
> “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

Paul states emphatically here that believers are justified! They do not need to become justified any more! They are justified on the ground of faith and not by works, so that no one may boast (see for example Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:9). The believer is justified on the ground of faith and has peace with God. He did not have to ask for that peace. He does not have to work for it either. He did not produce that peace himself. Therefore he does not have to maintain that peace himself. That peace has been given to him by God. The believer is justified and has peace with God. The Bible says this, and the believer must therefore believe it. He has received that peace through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is his Lord and Master. Through Him he has access to this grace. The believer stands in grace. This points to the position in which he stands. From that position he ought to live.
Paul therefore mentions three things here:

- the believer is justified by faith
- the believer has peace with God
- the believer stands in grace.

As for the future, the believer has hope. He rejoices in the hope (expectation) of the glory of God. He will moreover share in that glory (Romans 8:18).In the past we were enemies of God (Romans 5:10). That enmity has been done away with and we have received peace. We have

been reconciled to God—in every sense of the word. We stand in grace and from that grace we ought also to live. Because grace reigns over us, God no longer reckons with our old man. God does not even impute sins any more. In this way we are able to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14). When we serve the living God we shall be glorified with Christ in the future.

Romans 5 ends in verse 21 with:

Romans 5:21

“That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Sin no longer reigns over the believer. Instead, grace reigns over him. This does not mean that sin is no longer active in the believer. It means that sin is no longer the greatest power in his life. It is even theoretically possible that the power of sin has not decreased since he came to faith. But a far greater power than that of sin stands opposite it—namely the power/force of grace. The believer is no longer ruled by sin, but by grace.

> Romans 6:14
>
> “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”

We are not ruled by sin or by the law. We are “under grace.” Formerly we were “under sin” (Romans 3:9) and stood under the dominion of sin (Romans 5:21; 6:12). Now we stand under the dominion of grace. Where grace reigns, sin cannot in any way make us unfit to serve God.

> Romans 6:1-2
>
> “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”

Some believers think that they are unfit because of sin, or that other believers are unfit because of sin. This is wrong. God does not impute sin because grace reigns. That grace does not reign so that we can go through life “cheerfully sinning.” That grace reigns so that we might serve the living God! There are believers who think they can “sin as they please” because the grace of God only becomes greater through it. If the grace of God becomes greater, that is to the honour of God, they think. The more they sin, the more God is glorified because His grace becomes greater. One can hold this thought and even support it biblically, but the question is whether this is the purpose of God’s grace. God has not given grace as the reigning factor so that we believers can sin as we please. God has placed us under the dominion of grace so that—free from a defiled or burdened conscience—we might serve grace and righteousness (Romans 6:18).

Believers have been cleansed, sanctified and justified by God (1 Corinthians 6:11) so that they might serve Him. For that purpose they have received grace, and for that purpose grace reigns in them. In other words: for that purpose they have already been born again. It is most certainly not the purpose that we should continue in sin. “God forbid,” Paul exclaims. For we have become partakers of the suffering, death and dying of the Lord Jesus Christ! Our old man has been declared dead by God and we ourselves must therefore reckon our old man to be dead. That

is why we cannot justify before God continuing to live according to that old man. We cannot justify before God seeking the honour for/of that old man. We can do that, but that is not the purpose.

> Romans 6:3-5
> "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."

As believers we form part of Christ. We have become partakers of His suffering, death and resurrection. This obviously has a certain purpose. It concerns the purpose that God has with these things—not what advantage we might possibly gain from them. Paul also mentions that purpose here: "…that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (verse 4). Christ is held up here as Example. Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of the Father. The Lord Jesus Christ lived and lives to glorify His Father, as is clear from the Gospel of John (John 13:31-32; 17:4-5). The purpose of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that the living Christ should live to the honour of His heavenly Father. The Son serves the Father! Just as Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of the Father, so we also have been raised from the dead to the glory of the Father. The life we received at our new birth in/with Christ we must use to the glory of the Father. We are called to serve God.4.

Walking from the New Life

Many believers know little or nothing about what the Lord Jesus Christ has been doing since His resurrection. Many have only an abstract picture of God and of Christ. Many see Him as an intangible power in heaven. What He does is largely unknown. That is why many do not know their own position and task. When one does not know Christ, one does not know one's own Christian life either. Christ was raised to the glory of the Father. Believers have been raised with Him and must therefore walk in newness of life, for that is to the glory of the Father. It is not only about the fact that we have received life from God. It is especially about the fact that we walk from that new life. We have been raised to the glory of the Father. We have been born again so that we should walk in newness of life. This means that our life since our new birth looks (or is going to look) different from before. We are justified and have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. We stand in the grace we have already received. We rejoice in the hope of His glory, which we shall receive in the future. We have been born again. We have been raised with Christ with a certain purpose, namely that we should "walk in newness of life." We have received that new life to glorify God! We could continue living in sin since our new birth so that His grace might increase, but God has not raised us for that purpose. We are expected to walk in newness of life. This has everything to do with how we fill our life and our time. We must let the Lord have His place in every facet of our life—not only on Sunday or during a Bible study

evening. Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans to people who were already born again. He wrote to believers that they have died, been buried and been raised with Christ (Romans 6) and have even been placed with/in Christ in heaven (Ephesians 2:6). God has brought all this to pass for a certain purpose. That purpose is: to have part in His life (now) and in His glory (in the future). We have become one plant with the Lord Jesus Christ in His death, but also in His resurrection, with all the consequences that flow from it.

> Romans 6:6-9
> "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him."

Before God our old man has been crucified with Christ. Before God our old man is therefore dead. Many believers think that the Lord is there to help us through this old, earthly life. Many think that God should serve us because we have become His children. Usually people think this because they do not want to say goodbye to the old, earthly life. This thought is very inconsistent. For before God we had long since died (2 Corinthians 5:15). When we came to faith we formally and officially gave up our old, earthly life. Therefore we have lost every ground for laying claim to earthly things. The Bible does say that God will provide for His children, but that is only half the truth. God provides for those who love Him and therefore serve Him. God knows what we need. He cares for us and He gives us what He considers we need. This means that we do not need to occupy ourselves with that. Our heavenly Father knows what we need. He has promised to give us what we need.

> Matthew 6:33
> "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

This principle certainly applies to the coming dispensation, but it can also be applied to our own dispensation. When we put the things of the Lord concerning our dispensation in the first place, then He will freely give us all things that we need (Romans 8:32). It is of course a question of His righteousness and not our own. Yet it happens far too often that believers try to harness the Lord to their own little cart so that they can get their rights in this world or over against fellow believers. People even pray for that. But it is not about us! We must seek His righteousness. The Lord has promised to care for believers.

> 1 Peter 5:7
> "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

God has taken care of our new birth. He expects us to serve Him in the practice of our daily lives. He is our Lord and we are His servants (slaves). The Lord has no interest whatsoever in our old man unless we have placed that old man at His service. The Lord is only interested in the death of our old nature. For that purpose the Lord Jesus Christ died for us.

2 Corinthians 5:15

"And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."

Christ died for all. Therefore all men died. To those who believe in Him He has subsequently given new life, so that those believers should no longer live for themselves but for Christ. In this way God can use their old bodies —which were formerly ruled by sin—to the honour of His Name. In this way God reaches His goal with this old creation and with our old body. The body of sin has been destroyed (Romans 6:6). Therefore we no longer need to serve sin and we can serve righteousness (Romans 6:18). We have died with Christ and therefore we live with Him (Romans 6:8). These are established facts. To come into this position we have had to do nothing. Nor can we do anything by which we could lose this position. For it concerns the resurrection life of Christ of which we have become partakers, and that life is eternally abiding. Christ is raised from the dead and He cannot die any more. This applies to Christ and therefore it also applies to those who have come to faith since His resurrection, for they receive that same resurrection life. Because they have received that life they can serve God. God has made them fit for that purpose.

Romans 6:10-12

"For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof."

Christ died once for sin. Believers have likewise died in Christ. That must be their starting point. Christ lives for God. Since Christ lives for God, it is self-evident that believers also live for God. For they are alive to God in Christ Jesus. This means that they ought to be serviceable to God. Paul was actually already arguing this in Romans 6:4. Since we have died with Christ and have received new life in Him, sin must no longer reign in our mortal body. A "higher power" is at work in us—namely the power of grace. We must acknowledge that power by submitting ourselves to it. This means that we acknowledge that we are the property of God. Therefore we must submit ourselves to Him (1 Peter 5:6). Then He can do with our lives what He wills. For He is our Lord! Since we are the Lord's property we must place ourselves in His service. We are in fact His slaves. It is not fitting for us to ask Him to serve us. We are often occupied with whether we ourselves are saved and whether we shall go to heaven. These are the most fundamental and elementary matters. When someone in our dispensation comes to faith he is saved. He is placed in heaven in Christ. When a believer dies he goes to heaven because he was already placed there as a result of his new birth (Ephesians 2:6). This is an established position. The believer must accept this position. Then, from that position, he must serve his Lord. He has surrendered himself to the Lord and must therefore take up a servant's attitude. In this the fact that he is saved plays no role at all. The only question is whether he is useful to the Lord. Before we came to faith we were useless to God. That is why

God sent His Son so that we could be born again. Since then we can be useful to the Lord. This has everything to do with how we order the rest of our life and with the thoughts of our heart. When we place ourselves completely at the Lord's service we shall receive reward for it. Our reward is not that we shall come to heaven in the future, for we were already placed there the moment we came to faith.

> Ephesians 2:5-6
> "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

We have been placed in heaven in Christ. Then, in the practice of our daily lives, we must be useful and serviceable to the Lord. The Lord Himself determines in what way we can be useful to Him. Our attitude must therefore be: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" When we say this to Him sincerely it will certainly have consequences. Such a statement is never without obligation. The Lord holds us to such a statement!5. Consequences of a Life of Faith

Sin is no longer the ruling factor in our still mortal body. The Lord, however, wants to make that body alive by His Spirit who dwells in the believer (Romans 8:11).

> Romans 6:13-14
> "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

"Instruments" can also be translated as "weapons" or "tools." Formerly we presented ourselves (our members) as instruments of unrighteousness. Now that we have come to faith we must present ourselves as instruments of righteousness. Paul speaks here in general terms. He does not spell out what this involves. He mentions no specific consequences. He does not say either what we should or should not do. The believer is born again and he must place himself at God's disposal without asking and without knowing what the consequences will be. We present ourselves to Him as instruments of righteousness. If the Lord wills, He can use us. We only need to place ourselves at His disposal. At evangelistic meetings the invitation is given to surrender oneself to the Lord. It does not matter who one is or what one has done. One may come as one is. God offers His grace to everyone. When someone accepts this invitation, it is very likely that after a short time he will receive a visit from a representative of the group in which he came to faith. Then he is told all the things he may not do and must do. That was not communicated to him in the evangelistic meeting. When the gospel is proclaimed, the consequences of it must also be preached. When someone comes to faith he becomes the property of the Lord. He receives the life of the Lord. It is therefore only logical that God's life is also lived through or in the believer —in the practice of his life. It is easy to say that we have received new life. But what does that mean for the practice of our lives? Why have we already been born again now? If we do not serve Him then there is no

point in being born again already now. He gives us His life, His gifts (Ephesians 1:3), His Spirit. He does this so that His life, gifts and Spirit may have an effect in us to the honour of His Name. When these things have no effect whatsoever in our lives, then it is almost blasphemous to say that Christ dwells in us. In that case it means nothing. It only means something when Christ lives His life in us. Then our mortal bodies are used in His service. Our body is by nature led by our natural, human spirit. At our new birth we received the Holy Spirit so that that Spirit might henceforth lead our body for His work. We present our bodies to Him.
A good example of this is the person of Abram. Abram was a believer and God spoke to him.

> Genesis 12:1
> "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee."

Abram had probably not counted on this at all, but he did what God told him. The Lord wanted him in another place and so he went. When we read the further history of Abra(ha)m we may wonder why God sent him to that land, for he actually did nothing special there. But God wanted him there and so he went, even though he did not know where he was going. Abraham was a believer and he accepted the consequences of his faith. He set out without knowing where he would arrive. The Lord had told him very concretely. God would therefore have a purpose with it. We find this principle many times in the Bible. Saul wanted to serve his God, but he had been misled by the leaders of his time. At Damascus the Lord Himself intervened. When Saul came to faith it was immediately made known that God had much work ready for him. He wanted to serve his Lord and he did so. He himself considered it a great grace that he was allowed to do so (1 Corinthians 15:10).
By nature man is able to do nothing. At the moment he comes to faith he receives new life. Through this he can present his body as instruments of righteousness. Formerly he naturally served unrighteousness and sin. As one who is born again he can serve righteousness because grace and the Spirit reign in him. The believer is not under the law but under grace. This means in the first place that he learns to live from that grace. He must learn to look past his own sinful nature. Then he must make that grace known to others.

> Romans 6:22-23
> "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Fruit of Faith
Before we came to faith we bore no fruit for God (verse 21). Since we have come to faith we have become serviceable to God and we bear fruit. We do not need to do anything to bear fruit. When the right food is given, the fruit grows by itself. "Fruit" is the result of "life." Wherever there is life there is fruit. When we ensure that our spiritual life is fed by the Word of

God, then the fruit comes by itself. The life of Christ in us produces “fruit.” This can also be called “sanctification.” The result of the life of Christ in us is sanctification. On the one hand we are loosed from the world and on the other hand—in the practice of our daily lives—we are joined to the living God. That process is called “sanctification.” We do not need to worry about that, for the Lord works this process in us when we at least present ourselves as instruments of righteousness. The end (the goal) of service to God is everlasting life (verse 23). Many think they must serve God in order to receive eternal life one day. This is a misunderstanding, for Paul has argued at length in Romans 6 that believers have already received that eternal life and must also live from it. It is of course wonderful for a believer to have eternal life, but the most important thing is whether that life actually functions. Someone receives eternal life so that that life may function. That is also what Paul means here: the end (= goal) is eternal life. That eternal life must be lived; it must have an effect in the walk of the believer. The problem is often that the believer does not know that he has received eternal life. He often has no certainty about that, with all the consequences that follow. The Bible, however, is clear about it.

> 1 John 5:11-13
> “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

The believer has received the eternal life of God. It is then of course the purpose that His life should have an effect in the life of the believer. That life must stand in the service of the Father. The believer has received the life of God and he must then serve God with it. For that purpose (end) he has already received that eternal life now. By grace God has caused us to be born again. Then we may live every day from His grace. It is grace that we may daily present ourselves as instruments and servants of righteousness. We are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:5, 8). By grace—despite our shortcomings—we are enabled to serve God daily.

Hebrews 12:28
“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”

> Romans 7:4-6
> “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.”

The believer is not only dead to sin (Romans 6:11) but is also dead to the law by the body of Christ. This has happened so that he might become the

property of Christ, the Risen One. The purpose is that he should bear fruit. For this reason he has been set free from the law. This actually means that it was—and is—impossible to serve God while one is under the law. For when someone is under the law he cannot bear fruit for God. That is why the believer has been placed under the dominion of grace. The believer can then be serviceable in newness of the Spirit. Paul, by the way, mentions no specific matter concerning our personal, practical life here. He does not tell us what we should or should not do. He only mentions the principles according to which we ought to live. The believer must first learn to know his position as a child of God. The believer is dead to the world, dead to the law and dead to sin. On the other hand, he is alive to God in order to serve Him. He ought to present his members to be serviceable to righteousness unto sanctification (Romans 6:19), as a servant of righteousness. The word “servant” actually means “slave.” He is therefore expected to serve his Lord in submission. Romans 6 and 7 make clear from what the believer has been set free. Then in Romans 8 it is stated that he is led by the Spirit.

> Romans 8:4, 11, 14
>
> “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. … But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”

We have received the Spirit of sonship, for we are the firstfruits of the Spirit and we wait for the adoption (Romans 8:15, 23). It is also said that we shall share in the glory of Christ (Romans 8:18). At the end of Romans 8 we know exactly what our position is. Yet Paul has still said nothing about our practical doing and not doing. Instead of explaining that, he first devotes three chapters to the position of Israel (Romans 9–11). The things Paul explained in Romans 1 to 8 were originally promised to Israel. Paul first writes about the relationship between Israel and the Church because this is of the greatest importance. We must first know who we are, where we stand and to which people we belong. We must understand our relationship to sin, death and the law. We must also understand our relationship to the people of Israel. We must first know in what way God wants to be served before we can actually serve Him. How could we be involved in the Lord’s work if we have not the faintest idea what the Lord’s work consists of in our days? Sadly, most believers know little or nothing about this. In our dispensation the Lord is occupied with the calling, the formation and the building up of the Church which is His Body. It is therefore about the building up of the Church both quantitatively and qualitatively (Ephesians 4:12). In this the Lord wants to use us. The Lord is the One who works in us both to will and to do (Philippians 2:13). The only thing expected of us is that we place our lives at His disposal. We can do that, for He has set us free from the law and from the dominion of sin. When Paul has set out the above matters, he picks up the thread he dropped at the end of Romans 8. In Romans 9 to 11 he explained certain things concerning Israel. He continues:

> Romans 12:1-2
> “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

This statement actually corresponds with what Paul had already written in Romans 6. There he called the believer to present his body (his members) as instruments of righteousness. The believer must present his body as a living, holy and acceptable sacrifice to God. He ought to place his body at God’s disposal. If the Lord wills, He will use that believer. There are many churches and denominations where it is assumed that believers give tithes. The Bible says nothing about “giving tithes” in connection with the present dispensation. The believer is told that he has surrendered himself completely to the Lord—that is, one hundred percent. Our service does not consist in giving tithes for the maintenance of the Levites (or the minister). Our service is not based on the law. We place our entire life at God’s disposal. We surrendered ourselves to the Lord when we came to faith. Then it is the purpose that our mind (our thinking) should be renewed. By the renewing of our mind we are transformed. From the moment we came to faith our thinking must change in accordance with the Word of God. The first requirement is that we present our bodies as a living, holy and acceptable sacrifice to God. If we do not do that, our thinking will never be changed. Many people spend their whole lives with the Bible and follow all kinds of Bible studies, yet their thinking changes little or not at all. This is because they have not presented their bodies as a living, holy and acceptable sacrifice to God. When a person comes to faith he gives his life (if all is well) to the Lord. That is only the beginning. Then he must learn that he himself is no longer central. It is no longer about his own honour. He must learn to look away from visible things. In the world the principle of cause and effect reigns. The believer must learn that this principle does not apply with the Lord.

Thinking Differently

The (local) church is not built along organisational lines. The Spirit of God takes care of the building up of the Church. Personal spiritual growth is also brought about by the Spirit of God through the Word. A believer must learn all these things. His life no longer revolves around himself but only around the Lord. When he has learned all this he will no longer judge things by the outward, the visible. Then he will pay little or no attention to outward things because they play no significant role. The believer must learn to think differently. He can only learn this if he fills/feeds himself with different information. He no longer opens himself to the things of this world but to the things of God. In other words, he must take in the Word of God. Through that his thinking will change. In proportion as he seeks the things of God, that will influence his thinking. Because his thinking changes, his whole being will also change. When that happens he will learn by experience what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God.

Paul does not say what the good, acceptable and perfect will of God is. He is not speaking here about the general will of God concerning our dispensation. He is speaking about the good, acceptable and perfect will concerning our individual life. For every believer this is a personal, individual situation, in dependence upon his heavenly Father.
We would therefore do better not to occupy ourselves with the personal spiritual life of our fellow believers. The only way to come to know the good, acceptable and perfect will of God for ourselves personally is by letting the Spirit work in us. In this way we learn to understand and learn in practice what God wants from us. We place ourselves at His disposal. He will certainly begin to work in us and change our thinking. When our thinking changes, our will is changed. Then God can carry out His will in us. It is not the purpose that we should set to work ourselves in the hope that God will approve it. When we place our lives at the Lord's disposal today, we really do not know tomorrow what the Lord requires of us. We must not be in such a hurry about that. Time is needed. The Lord will work in us and call us in His own time for His work. Usually He calls us at a moment that is most inconvenient for us. Moreover, He asks things of us about which we say, "Must I do that now? There are surely other believers who can do that much better than I!" The Lord places us somewhere and therefore we are expected to do the work He has for us.
When we have surrendered ourselves to the Lord we must set priorities in our lives. Our first priority ought to be that we want to serve the Lord. That applies to every moment of the day—even when it does not suit us. There are believers who came to faith years ago and still do not know what the Lord's will is for their lives. It is wise for such believers seriously to ask themselves whether they have really placed their lives at the Lord's disposal. That must happen first. When a believer has not surrendered his life to the Lord, the Lord will certainly not tell him what His will is. That would have no point, for that believer would simply continue to live his own life.

> Romans 12:3-8
> "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness."

When we surrender ourselves to the Lord it does not mean that we are preparing ourselves for a prominent function. In practice it usually means that we are available to do the most unpleasant little jobs. Every believer is a servant of God, regardless of the task he has. There is nothing in that of which he could boast. We live from His grace. God gives us the grace

that He is willing to use us to do those unpleasant little jobs. For one person that may be washing up or cleaning toilets. Another may have the task of going to speak with a fellow believer. Yet another is called by the Lord to pass on His Word. One is not more than the other! God gives us certain things to do which we usually do not find pleasant at all. We must simply place ourselves at His disposal, without excuses. We cannot hide behind the fact that we are sinners, for He has taken away sin. Nor can we hide behind the law, for He has taken that away too. Believers often claim that they are not strong enough to do certain things. We cannot hide behind that either, for it is precisely when we are weak that His strength is made perfect. The apostle Paul experienced this in practice and writes about it.2 Corinthians 12:7-10

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

God’s strength is made perfect in our weakness, for His grace is sufficient for us. Other believers say they are not competent for a certain task. This excuse also does not hold, for God has made us competent.

> 2 Corinthians 3:5-6
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> “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

God has made us competent. When we perform the work He has given us to do, we therefore cannot boast in ourselves, for our competence is from Him. It has not come about through our old man but through the power of Christ. When we begin to exalt ourselves the Lord will certainly make that plain to us. When we are born again we accept His work of reconciliation. In doing so we have fundamentally given up our own life. We have lost that life. The Lord now has disposal of it under all circumstances. We must live in complete dependence upon Him. Everything we have we have received because He gave it to us by grace. Sometimes we have the feeling that He just lets us “struggle on.” At other times we notice that He gives us great strength. He has promised that we shall receive what we need. He sees to it that we can do the work in His service. The Lord also sees to it that we do not exalt ourselves. In this way we remain conscious of who we have become in Christ. As long as we walk here on earth we must live in all humility in submission to our Lord and fill ourselves with His Word in order to know His will.

> 1 Peter 4:2
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> “That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.”

Then we live from the abundance of His grace. There is no better life!